



— *T h e* **L E A D E R** —

"To Do" or not "To Do"...The Value of Time Management

By Harry J. Sauer

How often do we go home at the end of the day and say to ourselves:

"I wish there were more hours in the day."

"I never got to everything I needed to do."

"I really didn't get anything accomplished today."

"Where did my day go?"

If you are like most people, these subtle comments are whispered inside our minds far too often. So what can we do about it? What action steps can you take to be more productive, more efficient, more focused? These are great questions that require you to think about how you really spend your time and whether you are willing to make the necessary changes to improve your total productivity. Time can be your best friend or your worst enemy depending on how you choose to manage and control it. The changes are not easy, but the payoffs could be totally amazing.

PICTURE THIS

I observed a training class several years ago conducted by a relatively new manager by the name of Jason. In front of him on a table was a large fish bowl, a pile of various sized rocks and a bucket of sand. He described the fish bowl as representing an 8 hour day, the rocks as our high priority responsibilities and the sand as our low priority tasks.

Jason began by pouring an inch of sand in the fish bowl. He stated that when you come to work, you generally begin your day with some easy tasks such as checking email, listening to phone messages and getting a cup of coffee. These tasks probably use up about the first 45 - 60 minutes of the day. No problem. Now it's time to get serious. He throws in a bunch of rocks, at least an hour's worth of time. This represents a solid effort to get started on your important challenges of the day. Now it is mid-morning and the interruptions begin. The phone is ringing off the hook, your colleagues need you and it's time for another cup of coffee...more sand. Before you blink, lunch time rolls around and the fish bowl is half full of sand. You return from lunch. Emails and phone messages await...more sand.

At 2:30 it's time to get serious again and Jason throws in a bunch of rocks. At 4:00 o'clock he pours in the rest of the sand. He tries to squeeze in the remaining rocks but there's no room. It's now time to go home and the fish bowl is completely full. The day is over and there's no sand left, but several of the larger rocks are still on the table. High priority tasks remain unfinished.

Jason quickly empties the fish bowl, ready to demonstrate a much more constructive 8-hour day. He begins by pouring in an inevitable inch of sand. Now it's time to get serious...several rocks, a bit more sand and back to more rocks. At morning's end, we're looking pretty good. A quick lunch...more sand, more rocks, sand and rocks. By 4:00 o'clock there are miraculously no rocks left, but quite a bit of sand. It's no problem, as the remaining sand is poured into the fish bowl and trickles between the rocks filling in any empty space it can find. At 5:00 o'clock the table is empty, but for the fish bowl and its contents. The visual impact was incredible as the audience sat spellbound. There turned out to be plenty of time in this 8-hour day to get all the work done.

So what can we learn from this lesson? I recommend 5 straightforward steps towards wrapping your arms around this challenge of time management:

(1) CONCEPTUALIZE

Take a moment to write down the major categories of what you do on a typical day and assign the appropriate percentage of time you actually spend on each item. For example: 30% recruiting; 30% managing activity; 20% research and planning; and, 20% administration. If you are happy with your time allocations that's great. If you're not, sit back and really think about what you'd like them to be and write it down. In a perfect world, where should you be spending your time? Perhaps you can refer to your job description, or simply talk to your supervisor about his or her expectations. Don't rush, as this will become your new model of an ideal and productive day.



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(2) VISUALIZE

Absorb your new model and let it take shape in your mind. Validate it by translating the percentages into hours per day (or week).

For example, if you're going to spend 25% of your time on a particular task, that means 10 hours per week or 2 hours per day. Does this make sense? Before you get back to work, think about how you can adapt this model into your workday and come up with practical applications of how you're going to apply and manage it. If you can make it happen in your mind, you can make it happen in your day.

(3) ORGANIZE

Are you going to control your day, or is your day going to control you? Make a new "to do" list first thing every morning, but give yourself the flexibility to add things during the day. Refer to this list often and check off all completed work. Try to stay focused and don't stray too far from your predetermined tasks. If you finish everything on your "to do" list, start a new one.

(4) PRIORITIZE

What do you really need to get accomplished and what can wait? What are your highest priority tasks? Make sure you put them on top of your "to do" list and get to them as early in the day as you can. Put a star (*) next to these most important tasks. Attack each day with the challenge dujour. Don't procrastinate. Use your most productive hours for your most productive work. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. You can multi-task but don't get too sidetracked. Be attentive to the tasks at hand.

(5) CAPITALIZE

Eight hours is a long time. You have the formula and you've always had the power! Practice, your new model but don't get frustrated. You need a minimum of one to two weeks to see how it works. No excuses. Make it happen!

We are all creatures of habit. Far too often we develop bad habits and have difficulty turning them around and getting back on track. Effective time management requires discipline, self-control and commitment. If your goal is to be more productive, following these steps will lead you in the right direction. If you can go home and say you had a productive day, call it a success!!! "Time is money". Spend it wisely.

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